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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG

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SUBJECT: Chavez Blasts IACHR Human Rights Report as "Pure Garbage"

REF: 09 CARACAS 1545 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: Rolf Olson, Acting Political Counselor, DOS, POL;
REASON: 1.4(D)

11. (C) Summary: On February 25, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez strongly rejected the special report issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS), calling it "pure garbage" that reflected the continued "demonization" of Venezuela. The report, released on February 24, was highly critical of Venezuela's human rights record, noting the lack of an independent judiciary, political discrimination against Chavez's opponents, and claims that both human rights defenders and journalists are unable to freely carry out their work in the country. We can expect a similar response when our own Human Rights Report is released on March 9. End Summary.

IACHR Report Highly Critical

12. (SBU) The IACHR's special report, entitled "Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela," was highly critical of Chavez's human rights record. The 300-plus page report lamented "political intolerance, the lack of independence of the branches of State in dealing with the executive; constraints on freedom of expression and the right to protest peaceably; the existence of a climate hostile to the free exercise of dissenting political participation and to monitoring the activities on the part of human rights organizations." It also criticized the "prevailing impunity affecting cases of human rights violations" as a contributor to weakened rule of law and democracy in Venezuela.

13. (SBU) While the Commission praised the GBRV's efforts in seeking to eradicate illiteracy, reduce poverty, and increase access for the most vulnerable sectors to basic services such as health care, it also noted that "observance of other fundamental rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of realizing economic, social, and cultural rights in Venezuela."

¶4. (SBU) Upon his return from a trip to the Rio Summit in Cancun and to Cuba, Chavez unleashed his ire at the report's findings. Speaking at a press conference, Chavez called the report "pure garbage" and complained of the "demonization" of his Bolivarian revolution by the United States and the IACHR. Chavez described the report as part of a "conspiracy to sabotage" the Cancun Summit-proposed Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) from a "mafia" that included the OAS. Building on arguments he made in Cancun about the perceived need for "an Americas organization without the United States," Chavez added "someday the OAS needs to vanish." Chavez noted to Foreign Minister Nicholas Maduro that the report "wasn't worth responding to," but instead instructed him to look into withdrawing from that "awful commission." Chavez also heaped scorn on IACHR Secretary General Santiago Canton, calling him "pure excrement."

¶5. (SBU) During a February 25 press conference, Venezuela's top human rights official, Ombudswoman Gabriela Ramirez, echoed Chavez's remarks by accusing the IACHR of "attempting, once again, to discredit and weaken the democratic institutions of the (Venezuelan) state." Ramirez accused the IACHR of taking some

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statistics out of context and using others selectively, which she said, "takes away credibility and shows that bias of this organization." Ramirez also rehashed longtime GBRV arguments that the IACHR had recognized the de facto Carmona government after the April 2002 coup, and therefore could not be trusted.

IACHR Responds

¶6. (SBU) In an interview published in the February 26 edition of El Universal, IACHR Commissioner for Venezuelan Affairs Paulo Sergio Pinheiro noted that the report dedicated 70 pages to documenting Venezuela's advances in social justice. The Brazilian jurist stressed that the IACHR "is not the enemy of any government," and dismissed the GBRV's accusations of having supported the 2002 coup as "absurd." Pinheiro highlighted that Venezuela was the only country in the hemisphere to have refused admission to IACHR investigative teams in recent years, and lamented that Venezuela had "missed an opportunity" to establish a fluid dialogue with the commission. (Note: The last IACHR site visit to Venezuela took place in May 2002. The GBRV has consistently refused the Commission's requests to conduct subsequent site visits, as noted in reftels. End Note.)

¶7. (C) Comment: President Chavez has threatened to pull out of the Inter-American system before. With the scheduled March 9 release of our own Human Rights Report, we can expect a similar response from the GBRV to the perceived U.S. criticisms. End Comment.
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